

For Immediate Release

the video game category, and Viz Communications Inc. for publishing and distribution.

Based on the

HIDE YOUR SUNFLOWER SEEDS!

Previously published

HAMTARO IS COMING TO AMERICA!



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ShoPro USA Introduces Japan's Hottest Hamsters with the June 3rd Premiere on Cartoon Network;

ShoPro, Hasbro, Nintendo and Viz to Play Major Role in U.S. Launch

International licensing and distribution rights for Hamtaro in the United States and Canada have been awarded to ShoPro USA, an affiliate of Shogakukan Production Co., Ltd. (ShoPro).

San Francisco, CA (May 8, 2002) – Adorable and heart-warming Hamtaro and his hamster pals, the *Ham-Hams*, are coming to America! ShoPro USA, an affiliate of Shogakukan Production Co., Ltd. (ShoPro), will introduce one of Japan's hottest children's properties, *Hamtaro*, to kids across the United States this Summer. ShoPro, one of the leaders in the development of children's entertainment in Japan, is also a subsidiary of one of Japan's largest publishing companies, Shogakukan, Inc.

"The Hamtaro property has experienced tremendous success in Japan – from the television series to the licensed products, it is one of Japan's strongest children's brands, having exceeded \$2.5 billion in retail sales since the television launch in July of 2000," said John Easum, vice president of licensing & sales, ShoPro USA. "Now we are bringing the heartwarming adventures and fun of *Hamtaro* to the U.S. so that more kids can enjoy this wonderful and endearing property."

Cartoon Network, currently seen in 80.7 million U.S. homes, will premiere *Hamtaro* on Monday, June 3. The series is scheduled to air weekdays at 7 a.m. and 4 p.m. (ET, PT) during *Toonami*. The animated television series follows Hamtaro, an insatiably curious hamster, and his group of hamster pals, known as the "Ham-Hams." Ten-year old Laura, Hamtaro's owner, and her friends are not aware that when they head to school, their pet hamsters gather together in their Ham-Ham Clubhouse and plan their next adventure. Most of the time, the Ham-Hams spend their days keeping Laura and her classmates out of trouble, but sometimes the precocious pets find themselves in a dilemma of their own.

"The television series is just the beginning of our rollout into the United States," added Easum. "Later in the year we will be introducing other product lines including toys, games, home videos, books and video games." ShoPro USA has already lined up licensing giants Hasbro, Inc. as the toy and game licensee; Nintendo of America Inc. in

the video game category; and Viz Communications Inc. for publishing and home video distribution.

Based on the popular illustrated children's storybooks created by Ms. Ritsuko Kawai first published in 1997, the Japanese television series, "Tottoko Hamutaro" was introduced in Japan in July 2000. Since that time, *Hamtaro* has become one of TV Tokyo's top-rated kids television program.

ShoPro USA will officially introduce the *Hamtaro* property at the Licensing 2002 International Show June 11-13 in New York City. ShoPro USA is the master licensor for *Hamtaro* in North and South America. *Hamtaro* is produced by Shogakukan Music and Digital Entertainment and localized by ShoPro USA. Shogakukan Music and Digital Entertainment is a subsidiary of Shogakukan Production Co., Ltd. The *Hamtaro* website is located at <http://hamtaro.com>.

DOWNLOADABLE HAMTARO IMAGES:

<http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20020513/SFM004LOGO-a>
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FOR MEDIA REVIEW TAPES:

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PARTNERS AND LICENSEES:

Please see Launch Partners Contact Sheet for information on Cartoon Network, Hasbro, Inc., Nintendo of America Inc., and Viz Communications Inc.

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Hasbro, Inc. - Master

HAMTARO LAUNCH PARTNERS CONTACT SHEET

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JILL COLLINS 215.393.2000 ext. 2000

Hasbro (NYSE:HAS) is a worldwide leader in the development and

ShoPro USA – Master Licensor of Hamtarō, North and South America

Shogakukan Music and Digital Entertainment – Production Company for Hamtarō

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ShoPro (Shogakukan Production Co., Ltd.) is a subsidiary of **Shogakukan, Inc.**, one of Japan's largest publishing companies. ShoPro was founded in 1967 with the objective of developing Shogakukan's comic ("Manga") properties into new forms of media which include television and motion picture production, licensing, publishing, home video marketing, video game software development, advertising and event promotion. ShoPro is currently one of the leaders in the development of children's entertainment in Japan, having produced such TV series hits as *Pokémon* and *Zoids*. The producer of Hamtarō, **Shogakukan Music and Digital Entertainment** is a subsidiary of Shogakukan Production Co., Ltd. In Japan, ShoPro is also the licensing agent for a number of non-Japanese companies which include Lucasfilm and Twentieth Century Fox. ShoPro is also the Master Licensor for *Bob the Builder* for the Japanese market. In 2001, ShoPro had revenues of roughly \$400 million.

ShoPro USA was established in San Francisco in January 2000 and is an affiliate of ShoPro. ShoPro USA is a joint venture between ShoPro and Viz Communications Inc. ShoPro USA markets all new ShoPro properties in North and South America as its master licensor.

Cartoon Network – Television Broadcaster

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Cartoon Network, currently seen in 80.7 million U.S. homes and 145 countries around the world, is Turner Broadcasting System, Inc.'s 24-hour, ad-supported cable service offering the best in animated entertainment. Drawing from the world's largest cartoon library, Cartoon Network also showcases unique original ventures such as *The Powerpuff Girls*, *Dexter's Laboratory*, *Samurai Jack*, *Courage the Cowardly Dog*, *Ed, Edd n Eddy* and other *Cartoon Cartoons*. Since its launch in 1992, Cartoon Network has remained one of ad-supported cable's highest-rated networks. Cartoon Network's Web site is located at <http://CartoonNetwork.com> (AOL Keyword: Cartoon Network).

Turner Broadcasting System, Inc., an AOL Time Warner company, is a major producer of news and entertainment product around the world and the leading provider of programming for the basic cable industry.



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Hasbro, Inc. – Master Licensee for Toys/Games

For more information contact:

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Hasbro (NYSE:HAS) is a worldwide leader in children's and family leisure time entertainment products and services, including the design, manufacturing and marketing of games and toys ranging from traditional to high-tech. Both internationally and in the U.S., its PLAYSKOOL, TONKA, MILTON BRADLEY, PARKER BROTHERS, TIGER, and WIZARDS OF THE COAST brands and products provide the highest quality and most recognizable play experiences in the world.

Nintendo of America Inc. – Licensee for Video Games

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As the worldwide leader and innovator in the creation of interactive entertainment, **Nintendo Co. Ltd.**, of Kyoto, Japan, manufactures and markets hardware and software for its popular home video game systems. The systems include Game Boy®, Nintendo® 64, Game Boy® Advance and the NINTENDO GAMECUBE™. Since the release of its first home video game system in 1983, Nintendo has sold more than 1.4 billion video games worldwide, creating enduring industry icons such as Mario™ and Donkey Kong® and launching such franchises as Zelda™ and Pokémon®. As a wholly owned subsidiary, Nintendo of America Inc., based in Redmond, Wash., serves as headquarters for Nintendo's operations in the Western Hemisphere.

Viz Communications Inc. – Licensee for Home Video and Books

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Viz Communications Inc., is the leading U.S. publisher of Japanese animation and comics (anime and manga) for English-speaking audiences, serving a growing market of dedicated fans of all ages. Founded in 1986, Viz publishes over 20 titles every month including Ranma ½, Pokémon, Gundam and Dragon Ball Z. Viz also offers an integrated product line of consumer entertainment that includes magazines, comics, graphic novels, videos, DVDs and audio soundtracks. Based in San Francisco, California, Viz is one of the top five comics publishers in the U.S. and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Shogakukan, one of Japan's three largest publishers.

HAMTARO PROPERTY BACKGROUND



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In 1997, *Hamtaro* was introduced to Japanese children as a series of illustrated storybooks created by Ms. Ritsuko Kawai. The book series is based on Ms. Kawai's personal experience and relationship with her own pet hamster as a young girl. She recalled this relationship as being a heartwarming, nurturing and fun experience.

In 1999, two years after the first book release, the first home video, *Hamtaro's Birthday*, was produced and used for promotional and event purposes. The video was an instant hit, with very little marketing support.

In July of 2000, three years after the enormously successful book release, the *Hamtaro* television series was launched on TV Tokyo. The series was produced by Shogakukan Music & Digital Entertainment, a subsidiary of Shogakukan Production Co., Ltd. (ShoPro). Since its introduction, *Hamtaro* has consistently ranked as one of TV Tokyo's leading children's television shows.

On December 15, 2001, the first *Hamtaro* motion picture was released in Japan generating more than \$25 million at the box office, making *Hamtaro* one of the top grossing year-end movies.

Hamtaro has enjoyed great success since its launch in Japan including such highlights as:

- More than \$2.5 billion in sales in Japan since the TV launch in July of 2000
- Over 45 licensees and roughly 3,000 products in Japan alone
- One of the top rated children's programs on TV Tokyo
- Approximately 10% of Japan's 20 million households watch *Hamtaro* each Friday night
- In 2001, one of the strongest licensed character brands in Japan
- Top selling children's home video in Japan
- Top selling children's music soundtrack in Japan
- Category leader in children's publishing in Japan

Hamtaro is currently airing in Japan, Taiwan, Korea and Latin America. It will launch this Spring and Summer in the U.S. and Europe.

Panda

the courageous, sweet and enterprising and is very
HAMTARO
STORYLINE, KEY CHARACTERS
AND EPISODE SYNOPSSES



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STORYLINE

The animated television series centers on *Hamtaro* and his hamster pals, known as the *Ham-Hams*. Ten-year old Laura, *Hamtaro*'s owner, and her friends are not aware that when they head to school, their pet hamsters gather together in their *Ham-Ham Clubhouse* and plan their next adventure. Though their distinct personalities occasionally clash, the *Ham-Hams* band together to keep a watchful eye on their energetic owners. Most of the time, the group spends their days keeping Laura and her classmates out of trouble but sometimes the precocious pets find themselves in a dilemma of their own.

KEY CHARACTERS

<i>Laura</i>	A 10-year-old girl who is <i>Hamtaro</i> 's guardian. She is cheerful, energetic, outgoing... and sometimes a bit precocious.
<i>Hamtaro</i>	The cute and cuddly pet of Laura. His courage and adventurous spirit make him the inspirational hero of all the other hamsters. He's a lot of fun too.
<i>Boss</i>	Gruff on the outside, but sweet on the inside, this bachelor, field hamster wants to be in charge. His name, <i>Boss</i> , may reflect what he wants to be, but he'd give his own helmet and shovel to a <i>Ham-Ham</i> in need.
<i>Oxnard</i>	A timid and loyal hamster who is always hungry. He keeps a sunflower seed with him at all times to assure him that his next meal is not far away.
<i>Howdy</i>	Tidy, hard-working wisecracker, who has an innate gift for financial matters. Never without his shop-apron, he can spruce up a room in minutes and not miss a chance to amuse others with one-liners along the way. <i>Howdy</i> lives in a convenience store.
<i>Bijou</i>	A recent resident of France, the elegant <i>Bijou</i> enjoys her friends, ribbons and jewels. With her refined and delicate nature, she is the <i>Ham-Ham</i> sweetheart.
<i>Pashmina</i>	Responsible and dependable, <i>Pashmina</i> loves her precious <i>Penelope</i> , her <i>Ham-Ham</i> friends and anything that matches her favorite pink scarf that she always wears.

<i>Panda</i>	He is creative, sweet and enterprising and is willing to pitch in on a project. A builder and craftsman, he keeps busy drafting plans for many things and dreams of someday being a carpenter.
<i>Maxwell</i>	A book smart hamster of higher learning. <i>Ham-Hams</i> go to Maxwell for knowledge of the world around them.
<i>Sandy</i>	With her "valley-girl" ways is social and athletic. She keeps the <i>Ham-Hams</i> on their toes with her sporty style all the while keeping a close eye on her flirtatious twin brother, Stan.
<i>Stan</i>	The dedicated twin brother of Sandy, Stan fancies himself a Casanova hamster with his maracas and Latin rhythms. When he's not working out at the gym or trying to be Mr. Popularity, he can usually be found flirting with all the girl hamsters.
<i>Cappy</i>	Shy and hesitant – he is always looking for something new to put on his head. He's willing to try all sort of things, but standard saucepans are his cap-of-choice.
<i>Penelope</i>	The youngest hamster, Penelope learns about the world through the other <i>Ham-Hams</i> who see her as a little sister and want to protect her. She has an extra special friend though, her favorite Ham, Pashmina. The only words Penelope can say are "Ookyoo!" and "Ookwee!"
<i>Jingle</i>	The Ham poet and lone guitar-playing wanderer, Jingle comes along to offer offbeat songs of wisdom to help the <i>Ham-Hams</i> find their way.
<i>Dexter</i>	A dapper dandy, this well mannered, gentleman hamster is always smartly dressed and ready to help.
<i>Snoozer</i>	Even though he's almost always sleeping, Snoozer is still the idea "Ham of few words." He occasionally wakes up to provide practical advice to the <i>Ham-Hams</i> when needed.

Episode 26 – The Legend of the Wicked Hamster

One afternoon Louis finds a tiny hamster in the middle of the garden. He is both fat, asleep and eaten breathing. According to the story, Louis lived in a lovely castle protected by "Ham-Ham Knights." One day the Ham-Stars turned against the Ham-Ham Knights and made it a custom and a break knight will have them做成the people of the Ham. When Hamster appears at the castle he is accused of being the wicked Ham-Wizard and is forced to the dungeon. Oxford and the enchanting Hippo help him escape because he goes to battle against the evil wizard. He is turned to stone. Louis, the tiny Ham-Stars comes breathing and causes Hamster back to life. Hamster who flies the dog Harry through the sky and defeats the Wicked Ham-Wizard. Louis and Hamster make friends having shared the same dream.

EPISODE SYNOPSSES

Episode 18 – “The Slipper Chase”

When Laura is asked to perform the role of Cinderella in the school play, the nervous actress accidentally leaves one glass slipper at home. When Hamtaro discovers the lost slipper, he and his *Ham-Ham* friends set out to secretly deliver the slipper to the theater. They seek help from the wandering Ham-poet, Jingle who is eager to help them find “the mythical pumpkin coach” where the play is in progress. With Jingle’s dreamy guidance, the hamsters meet a brood of unfriendly chickens and can only escape after their poetic leader accidentally frightens the chickens away. The *Ham-Hams* then secretly deliver the slipper before Laura’s entrance and enjoy the rest of the play. Afterwards, Laura meets Hamtaro back at home and tells him all about her performance. She then tells him she thinks that maybe someone is watching over her. Hamtaro breaks into a quiet smile.

Episode 24 – “Hamtaro, Please Come Home”

One day Laura takes Hamtaro for a walk and wears her new favorite red ribbon. Suddenly the red ribbon blows off Laura’s head and lands in a box on a transport truck. Hamtaro jumps into the box to rescue it, but Hamtaro and the ribbon get whisked away. The truck takes Hamtaro into the deep countryside and when the truck hits a bump, he and the ribbon fly out the back. Hamtaro then sets off through a blizzard and after collapsing from exhaustion a kind man and his dog find him and begin nursing him back to health.

In the meantime, the hamster network is busy distributing “Missing Hamster” posters, trying to find Hamtaro. Soon Hamtaro is well enough to travel again so he bids his kind friends farewell. While trying to find his way, he runs into the Ham-poet, Jingle and they hitch a ride on Herbert, the pink pig. They encounter the rambling hamster, Sabu, who recognizes Hamtaro from the “Missing Hamster” posters. Finally, Francoise the white pigeon carries Hamtaro on the last leg of his journey home. When Hamtaro is reunited with the Hamsters and an overjoyed Laura, he has a lot of stories to tell.

Episode 26 – “The Legend of the Courageous Hamtaro”

One afternoon, Laura reads a fairy tale to Hamtaro. In the middle of the story they both fall asleep and start dreaming. According to the tale, Laura lives in a lovely castle protected by “*Ham-Ham Knights*.” One day the Ham-Star burns red in the sky, a sign that an evil magician is arriving and a brave knight will save them, so says the prophet, Elder-Ham. When Hamtaro appears at the castle he is accused of being the Wicked-Ham Wizard and is brought to the dungeon. Oxnard and the enchanting Bijou help him escape, but when he goes to battle against the evil wizard, he is turned to stone. Soon a new Ham-Star shines bright and returns Hamtaro back to a noble hamster who rides the dog Brandy through the sky and defeats the Wicked Ham-Wizard. Laura and Hamtaro wake relieved, having shared the same dream.

HAM-HAM LANGUAGE



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Hamtaro and his *Ham-Ham* friends have their own unique language that only they understand. The sounds and words they use express their feelings, thoughts and daily activities.

In Japan, many *Hamtaro* fans have adopted the language and are using it to communicate with their friends.

Soon this language will be heard in schoolyards and playgrounds across the U.S. Below are just a few examples of Ham-Ham Language!

Kushi-Kushi

Sound made when hamsters are embarrassed or shy; or when they are cleaning/grooming themselves, or scratching their heads.

Heke?

Sound made when surprised or confused or when hamsters discover something. Similar to "huh?!"

Khrrmp-Khrrmp

Sound used to convey eating (munch-munch).

Oopaa!

Used when hamsters see something they desire and take off after it.

Badda-Badda

Sound conveying the "thumping" of running feet.

Hamha!

A greeting. Encompasses expressions like "good morning" or "hello."

Bye-Q

Means "good-bye." Bye + Thank you = Baikyu.

Grooba!

An expression that conveys a lot of effort, putting your all into something.

Schmubby-Wubby

The sound made when the hamsters show their affection for one another. They rub together.

Wasa-Wasa

Sound Ham-Hams make when walking.